



CULTURE IN ACTION: NAVIGATING CULTURAL INSIGHTS

Understanding dimensions of high performing teams through a cultural lens

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Hofstede Culture in the Workplace Questionnaire™ (Hofstede CWQ) Dimensions & Orientations

In today's dynamic workforce, leaders must navigate diverse cultural influences that shape organizational behaviour. As global interconnectivity grows, understanding cultural differences is essential for effective leadership and success.

Professor Hofstede's Cultural Model outlining the 6 dimensions of culture offers a robust framework for understanding how cultural preferences influence behaviour both within and beyond the workplace. We study culture to help understand the rationale behind people's actions and behaviours, as it is only in understanding and recognising specific behaviours in oneself and others can one be sure to act and respond appropriately. When speaking about cultural orientations, we generally use phrases such as "*Mary has a preference for X orientation*" or "*Tom is socialised with values aligned with X orientation*". Cultural metacognition – the ability to reflect on one's own cultural assumptions and those of others is key in recognising, respecting and reconciling cultural differences.

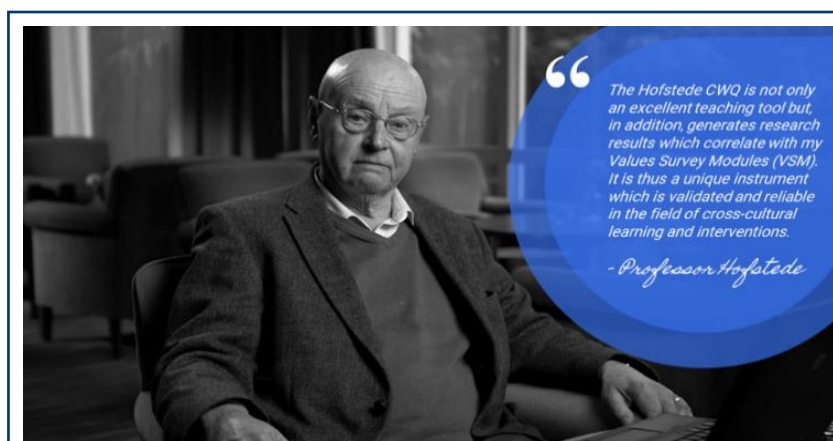
Hofstede's Cultural Model is a framework to understand cultural differences and is based upon dimensions that help measure relative differences between cultures and quantify these differences. For each dimension, there are two opposing extremes, referred to as orientations. Each country in the model is characterised by a score on each of the dimensions. The score for each country can then be plotted along a continuum – a higher score will indicate a tendency towards the orientation indicated on one end of the continuum and a lower score will indicate a tendency towards the orientation on the opposite end of the continuum.

When studying Hofstede's dimensions, what is arguably more important than individual, or country scores is the ability to recognise behaviours that indicate a preference for one orientation or another of a cultural dimension. Hofstede's dimensions are value-neutral, without judgement of which side of the orientation dichotomy is better.

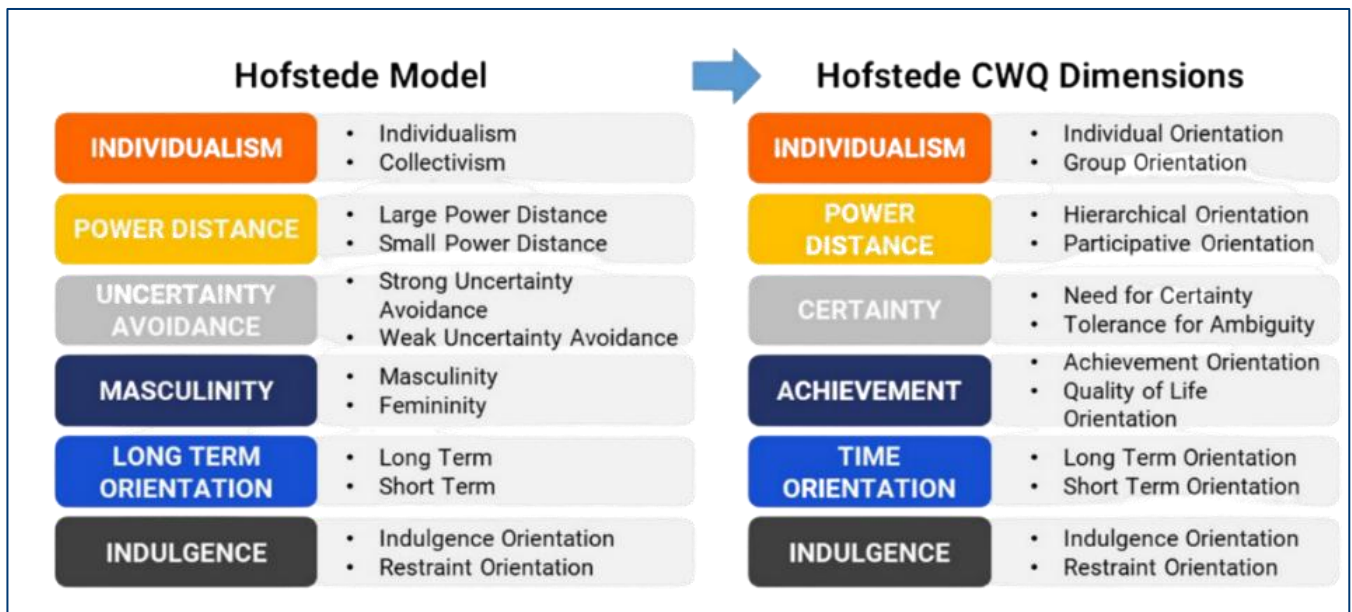
The output expected of managers in India, in Australia, in Singapore or in Thailand is the same however the approach to how they achieve it, may be quite different

It's not wrong, it's just different...

The Hofstede CWQ is based on Hofstede's Cultural Model and is the only cultural questionnaire fully endorsed by Professor Hofstede. The questionnaire report generated helps individuals improve their effectiveness by providing insights on their specific cultural values and when conducted as a team, provides insights into the cultural preferences of those with whom they interact – to enhance ones' ability to understand cultural differences and adapt actions accordingly.



The Hofstede CWQ has updated 2 of Professor Hofstede's original 6 dimensions, specifically Masculinity and Long-term Orientation to better suit today's workplace.



The 6 dimensions are defined as below:

1. **Individualism:** The degree to which action is taken for the benefit of the individual, or the benefit of the group
2. **Power Distance:** The degree to which inequality or distance between those in charge and the less powerful (subordinates) is accepted
3. **Certainty:** The extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous, unknown or unpredictable situations, or the extent to which they accept that uncertainty and ambiguity are normal features of life
4. **Achievement:** The degree to which we focus on goal achievement and work or quality of life and caring for others
5. **Time Orientation:** The extent to which members of a society are prepared to adapt themselves to reach a desirable future, or the extent to which they take their guidance from the past and focus on fulfilling their present needs and desires
6. **Indulgence:** The tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic human drives related to enjoying life and having fun, or the conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms

By understanding these dimensions individually, as well as how these dimensions interact with one another, leaders can better appreciate the cultural drivers behind key workplace behaviours. This understanding not only supports the development of effective leadership strategies but also helps in building teams that respect and leverage cultural diversity.

Dashboards Derived from Synergistic Combinations of the Cultural Dimensions

Dashboards serve as visual tools that overlay 2 dimensions providing insights into 15 traits of high performing teams. Rather than providing definitive prescriptions, the insights below present an interpretive approach to understanding how cultural preferences shape leadership styles and workplace behaviours.

	Individualism	Power Distance	Certainty	Achievement	Time Orientation	Indulgence
Individualism		Decision Making	Change Approach	Social Orientation	Loyalty	Interactions
Power Distance			Organization Configuration	Leadership	Power Structures	Discipline
Certainty				Motivation	Business Processes	Approach to Life
Achievement					Focus of Life	Approach to People
Time Orientation						Goal Setting
Indulgence						

When the two dimensions are overlaid, they create a dynamic dashboard in the form of a four-quadrant matrix, with each quadrant representing a distinct combination of high and low scores. This framework offers nuanced insights into behavioural preferences, highlighting how different cultural profiles emerge from the interplay of these dimensions. Each quadrant provides insights into specific behavioural styles.

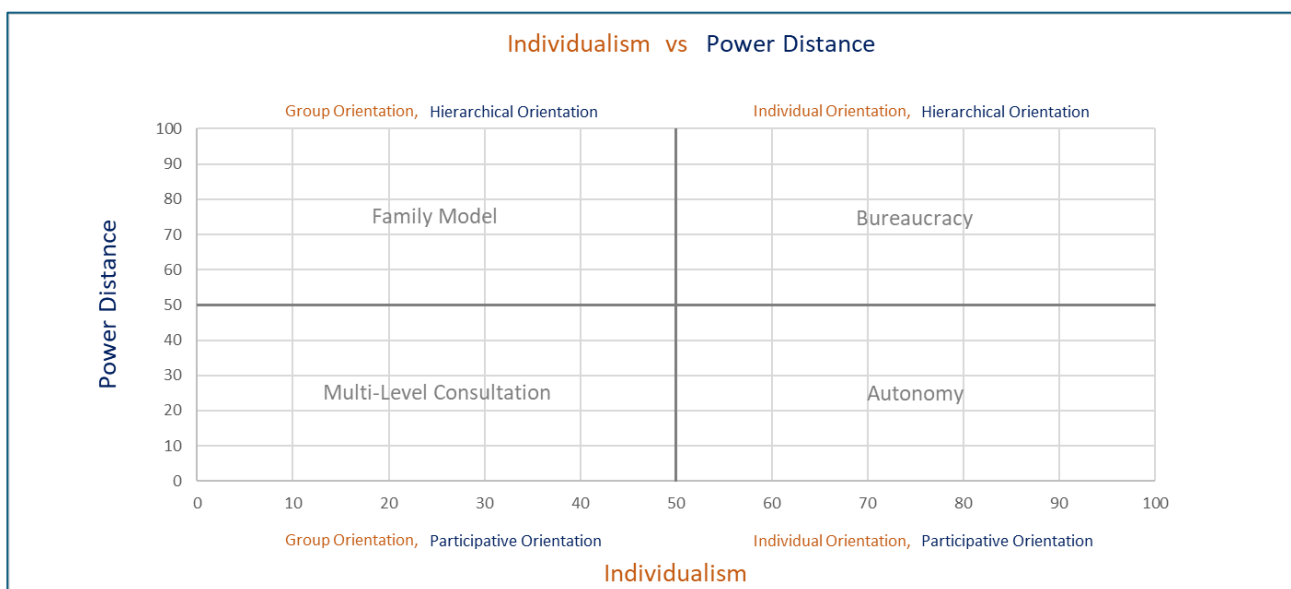
The value of these insights lies in their practical applications. By offering a structured approach to adapting strategies in culturally diverse environments, they empower leaders to enhance inclusion, agility and organizational effectiveness.

Decision Making

The process by which individuals or teams gather information, evaluate options and choose actions that align with the objective

Individualism determines whether decisions are driven by self-reliance or group support, and Power Distance defines whether decisions flow from top-down or collaborative inputs. Together, they explain how decisions are initiated, who influences them, and the styles of leadership involved.

In cultures where there is a preference for Individualism and Participative Orientation like the US, decision making is usually decentralised and participative, empowering employees. Conversely, in environments with a preference for Group Orientation and a Hierarchical structure such as Japan, decisions tend to be made by senior leaders with a strong emphasis on loyalty and group consensus.



- **Family Model:** Decisions are made by strong authority figures, with group inputs
- **Multi-Level Consultation:** Decentralised decisions with inputs from multiple stakeholders
- **Bureaucracy:** Hierarchical decision making, often through individual preferences associated with positional power
- **Autonomy:** Independent, decentralized decision making

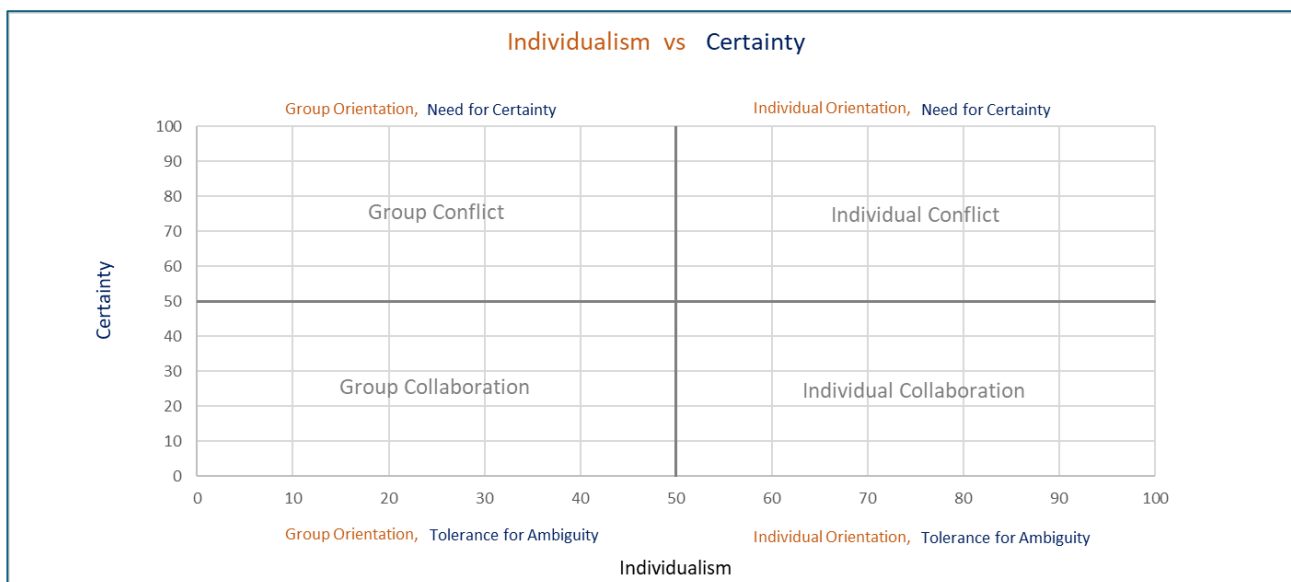
The overlay of the Individualism and Power Distance dimensions uniquely shows the interplay between self-reliance and group support - providing insights on whether decisions emerge through collaborative inputs & shared responsibility, or top-down directives & authority

Change Approach

The way in which individuals or teams respond to new circumstances, manage transitions, and evolving challenges

When Individualism and Certainty scores are overlaid, insights into change approaches are gleaned. The individualistic tendency influences whether change is championed by personal initiative or requires collective endorsement, while the level of certainty affects how comfortable people are with risk and ambiguous situations.

In countries where Individualism is high and there is a Tolerance for Ambiguity, such as in the US, change is seen to be rapid and innovation driven, as compared to collectivist and risk-averse environments with a Need for Certainty such as Japan, change is approached with careful planning and a broad consensus to ensure stability.



- **Group Conflict:** Change efforts are carefully considered & resisted through group representation
- **Group Collaboration:** Change is attempted as a collective process
- **Individual Conflict:** Structured approaches to change are preferred. Change that is not aligned to personal preferences is opposed at an individual level
- **Individual Collaboration:** Individuals are open to change; and innovation is valued

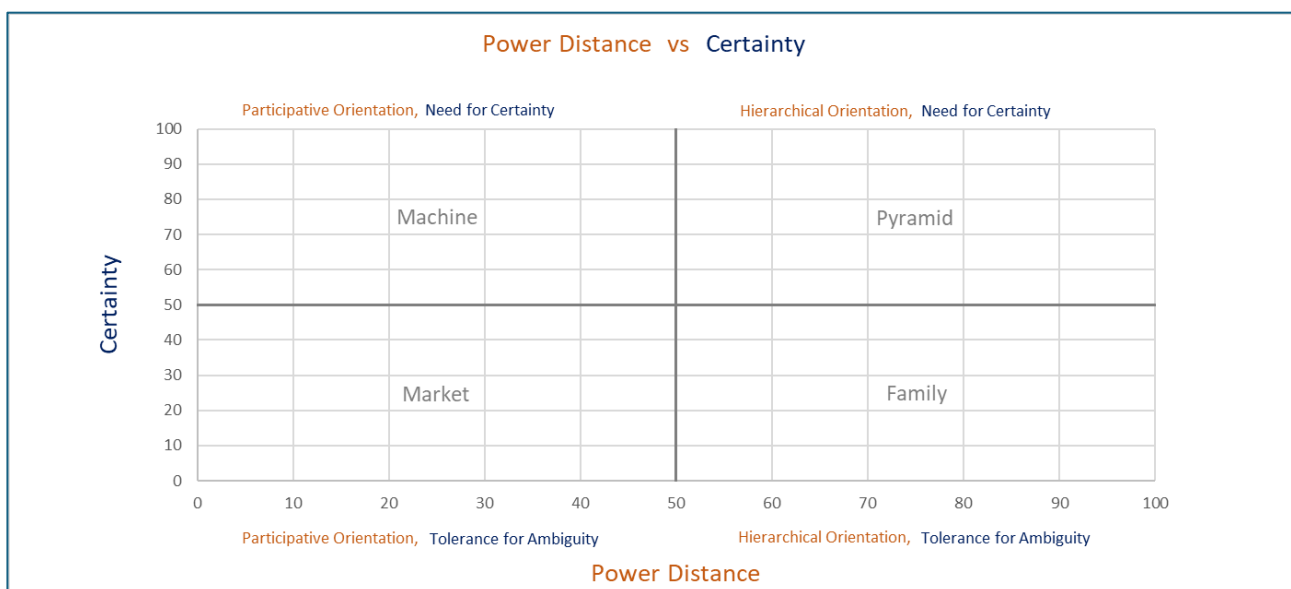
The overlay of the Individualism and Certainty dimensions explain attitudes towards seizing change opportunities individually or within groups... with acceptance & innovation or deliberation & precision

Organisation Configuration

The structure and design of an organisation, encompassing the hierarchy, roles and systems that guide its operations

The Power Distance dimension provides insights on whether hierarchies are strict and centralised, while Certainty shapes the level of formalisation and structure within organisational processes. Together, these dimensions give insights into subjective characteristics that highlight how hierarchies and structure shed light on approaches to solving organisational problems.

For instance, in the countries like India and Indonesia, organisations are characterised by parental leadership, in which the owner - manager is viewed as the (grand) father expecting respect and obedience. Whilst Germany is a classic example of a Participative culture with a high Need for Certainty.



- **Machine:** 'Well-oiled machine' structuring activities without a concentration of authority; decentralized, but clear & structured processes
- **Market:** Referring to a 'village market' advocating neither concentrating authority nor structuring activities
- **Pyramid:** Advocates measures to concentrate authority and structure the activities
- **Family:** Concentration of authority without structuring of activities. Organisations are considered extended family

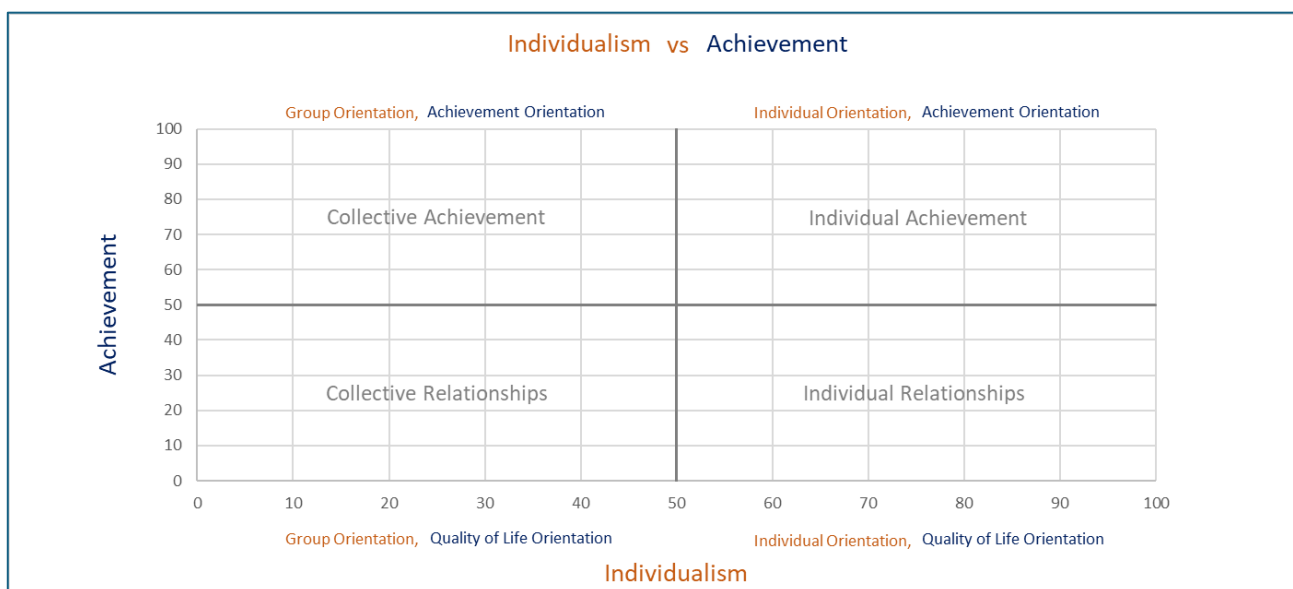
The overlay of the Power Distance and Certainty dimensions provide insights on preferences towards agile, less formal structures with a consultative approach or rigid, rule bound configurations with a top-down approach

Social Orientation

How individuals prioritise relationships and social connections within the workplace, shaping collaboration and teamwork

Individualism influences whether people focus on personal goals or collective interests while the Achievement dimension provides insights on whether individual success or modesty and cooperation are prioritised. An overlay of these dimensions provides insights on how teams interact and balance the drive for personal achievement and collective well-being.

In individualistic cultures such as the US, interactions are often competitive and success driven, whereas in more collectivist and relationship focussed settings such as South Korea, the influence is on shared success and group cohesion.



- **Collective Achievement:** Team success prioritised
- **Collective Relationships:** Collaboration and social harmony valued over success; emphasis on group harmony and shared successes
- **Individual Achievement:** Competitive, success driven interactions
- **Individual Relationships:** Interactions that focus on individual relationships rather than success.

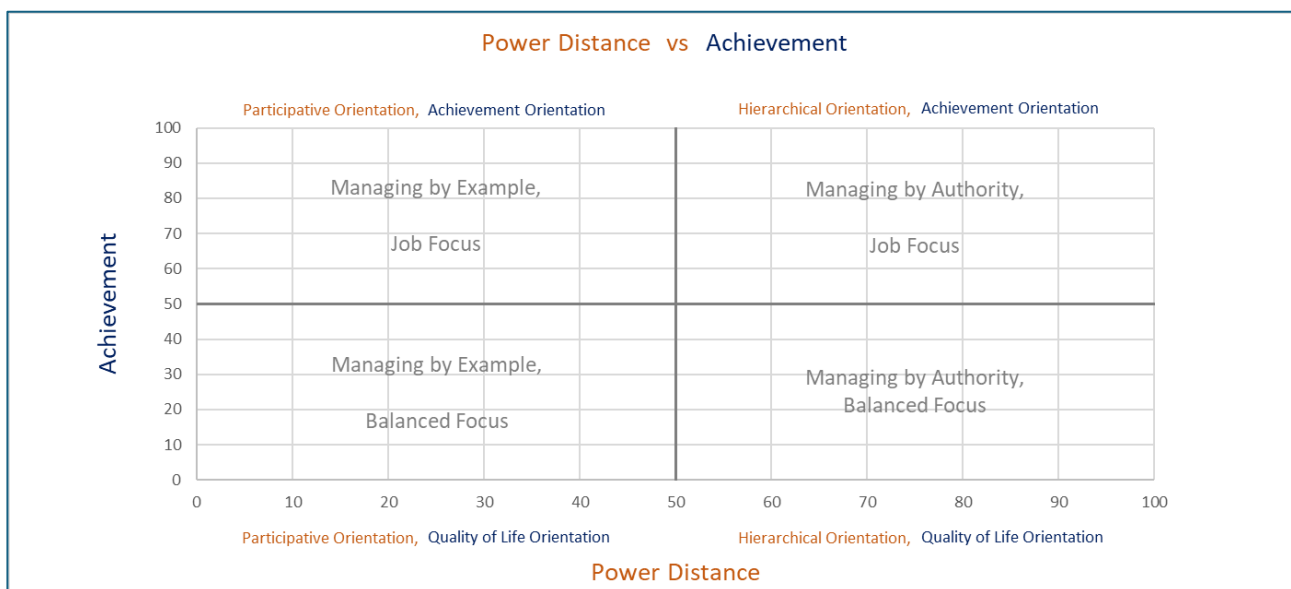
The overlay of the Individualism and Achievement dimensions offer insights into how individual interactions are influenced by collective interests, revealing the balance between self-reliance & group cohesion and goal achievement & mutual support

Leadership

The style and practice of guiding, inspiring and influencing others to achieve common goals

Leadership styles emerge from the interplay between Power Distance and Achievement through insights on leadership approaches – from directive, top-down styles to participative people centric methods.

In countries with Participative and Quality of Life Orientations such as The Netherlands, leaders tend to be collaborative, and performance focussed, whereas in cultures with a preference for Hierarchies and high Achievement, such as Japan, leadership is more hierarchical and goal oriented.



- **Managing by Example (Job Focus):** Focus on results through collaborative efforts
- **Managing by Example (Balanced Focus):** Participative leadership; focus on collective wellbeing
- **Managing by Authority (Job Focus):** Strong, authoritative leader(ship); results focussed
- **Managing by Authority (Balanced Focus):** Authoritative yet nurturing leadership; leaders seen as caretakers

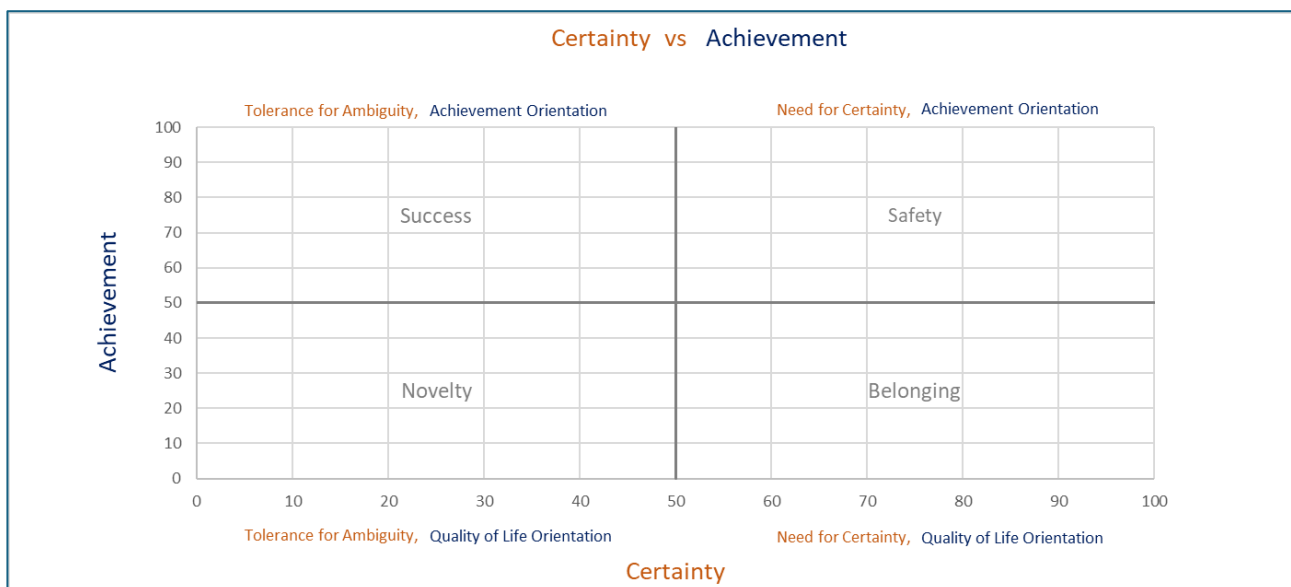
The overlay of the Power Distance and Achievement dimensions demonstrates how varying expectations of authority and results shape leadership styles – those valuing authority or shared responsibility and those prioritising the task itself or the person doing the task

Motivation

The internal and external factors that drive individuals to perform, engage and strive for success

Certainty can influence whether organisational goals and rewards are clearly structured, or more flexible, while the Achievement dimension indicates whether motivational drive is rooted in competitiveness or holistic well-being. The overlay of these dimensions provides insights on how employees can be inspired and incentivised.

In environments that value High Achievement and have a Tolerance for Ambiguity like the US, employees often thrive on innovation and competitive challenges. In contrast, in settings that prioritize Certainty and stability such as South Korea, motivation is driven by clear expectations, supportive teamwork, and structured processes.



- **Success:** Risk taking and competition drive motivation; driven by innovation and competitive challenges in a flexible setting
- **Novelty:** Motivation stems from a flexible, socially supportive environment that nurtures new ideas
- **Safety:** Success through clear structured goals and incentives, that create a safe progression; stability is a key motivator
- **Belonging:** Motivation derived from clear roles, supportive teamwork and a sense of identification

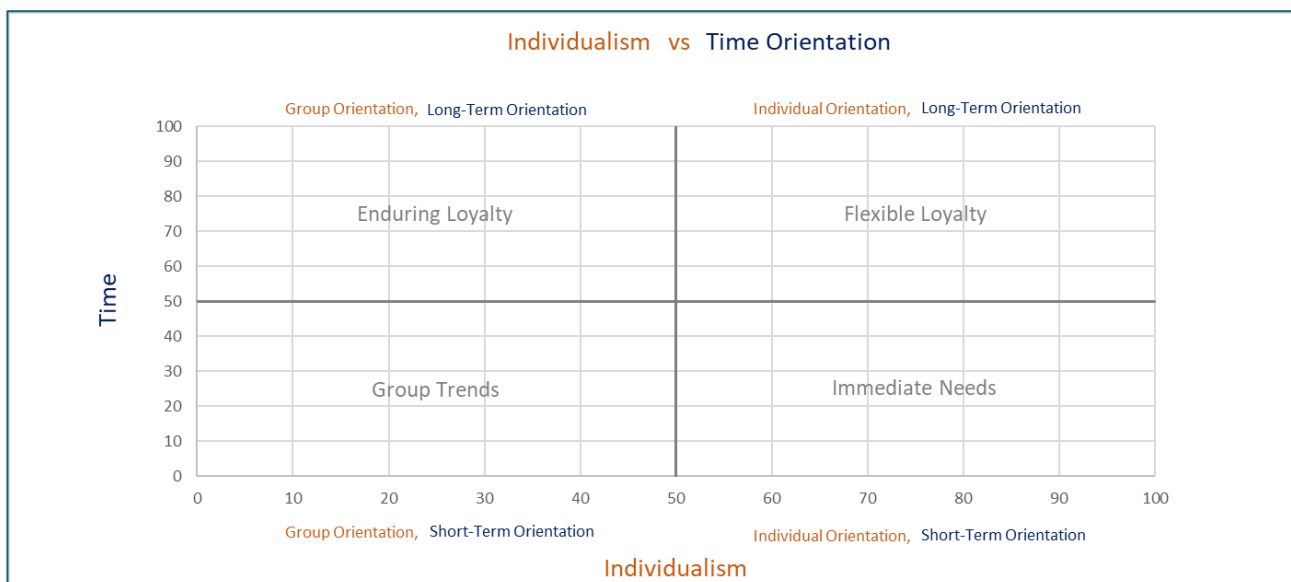
The overlay of the Certainty and Achievement dimensions to demonstrate whether employees are inspired by well-defined, precise and structured rewards, or driven through the challenge of pursuing ambitious (and potentially) unstructured goals

Loyalty

The level of commitment and dedication employees have towards the organisation and its values

Individualism can provide insights into whether loyalty is tied primarily towards personal benefits or collective identity, and Time Orientation distinguishes between a Short-term focus and Long-term commitment. Together, these dimensions explain how and why employees develop loyalty towards an organisation.

In cultures characterised by high Individualism and a Short-term outlook such as the US, loyalty may be seen as more transactional – whereas in collectivist societies with a Long-term Orientation such as China, loyalty tends to be deep rooted in supporting long-term relationships and team cohesion.



- **Enduring Loyalty:** Deep rooted loyalty with an emphasises on long-term collective commitment
- **Group Trends:** Group loyalty is expected, but flexible based on surrounding factors
- **Flexible Loyalty:** Loyalty is aligned with long-term personal career growth
- **Immediate Needs:** Loyalty is transactional and often based on immediate personal needs and benefits

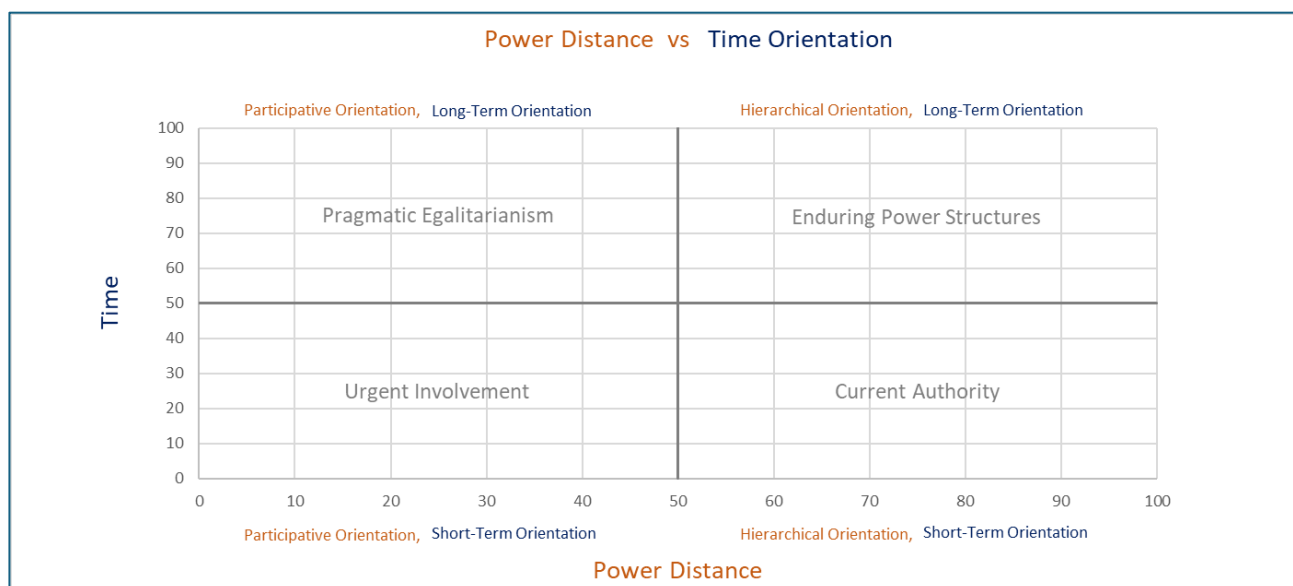
The overlay of the Individualism and Time Orientation dimensions reveals whether organisational commitment is viewed as a short-term and transactional valuing current gains or as a long-term lasting bond, prioritising future opportunities and group support

Power Structures

The distribution of authority and influence within the organisation, shaping who makes decisions and how power is exercised

Power Distance determines how authority is distributed and accepted within an organisation, and Time Orientation indicates whether structures prioritise immediate success or strategic, long-term planning. Together these dimensions explain how leadership evolves and how power is managed over time.

In cultures with a preference for shared responsibility and short-term wins such as the US, Australia and Denmark, authority tends to be decentralised and agile, while in those with a preference for hierarchies and long-term objectives as in Japan and China, power structures tend to be centralised and stable and prioritise continuity and planned succession.



- **Pragmatic Egalitarianism:** Flat hierarchies with leadership intervention on a short-term strictly on as needed basis.
- **Urgent Involvement:** Flexible, meritocratic power distribution; authority is decentralized and agile, facilitating rapid decisions
- **Enduring Power Structures:** Traditional, rigid power structures that have evolved over time
- **Current Authority:** Centralised authority with positional power precipitating immediate control and compliance

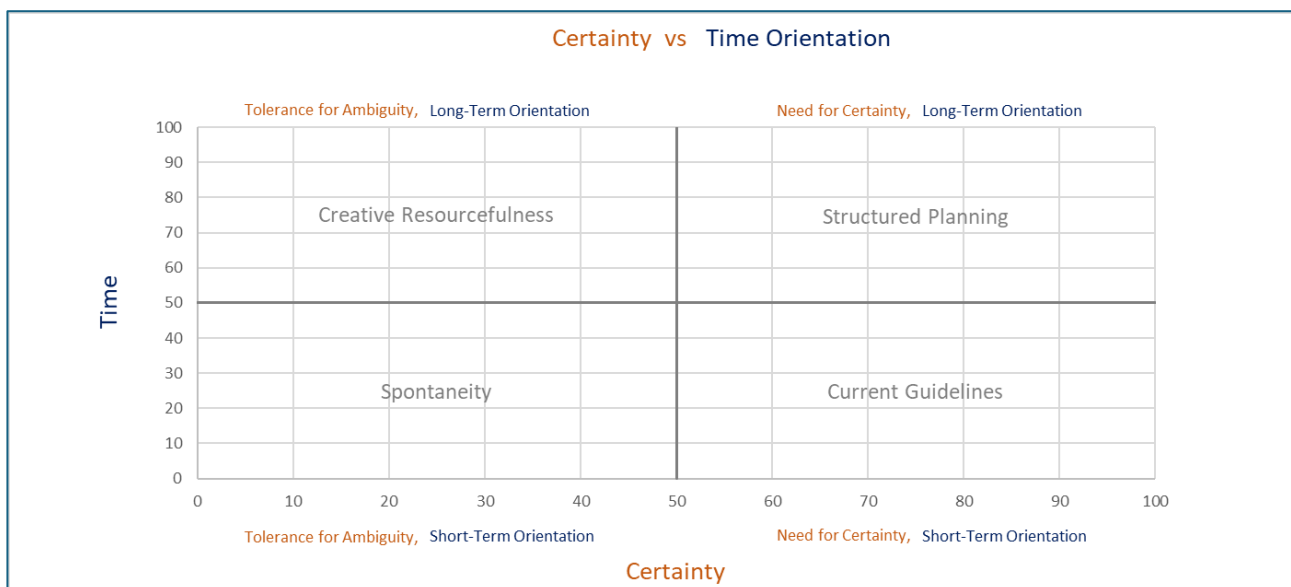
The overlay of the Power Distance and Time Orientation dimensions show the interplay of hierarchical acceptance with temporal focus - highlighting whether power is dynamic and decentralized as per the situation, or stable and centralised with specific individuals holding authority

Business Processes

The established procedures and routines that organise work and ensure consistency, efficiency and quality

Business processes are influenced by Certainty, which dictates how standardised or flexible procedures are, and by Time Orientation – which guides whether the goal is quick results or long-term sustainability. Together, these dimensions explain how organisations balance the need for consistency with the ability to adapt to change.

For instance, in cultures with a Tolerance for Ambiguity and Short-term focus such as Denmark, processes tend to be agile – whereas in those with a higher Need for Certainty and Long-term focus such as Japan, South Korea and Germany, processes are thoroughly planned and structured to ensure enduring efficiency and resilience.



- **Creative Resourcefulness:** Flexible and focussed on solutioning, leveraging current resources and limitations, in a sustainable manner
- **Spontaneity:** Focus on 'gut' feel, maybe resulting in long-term trade-offs
- **Structured Planning:** Structured processes with a long-term view
- **Current Guidelines:** Efficiency focused guidelines to 'get things done now'

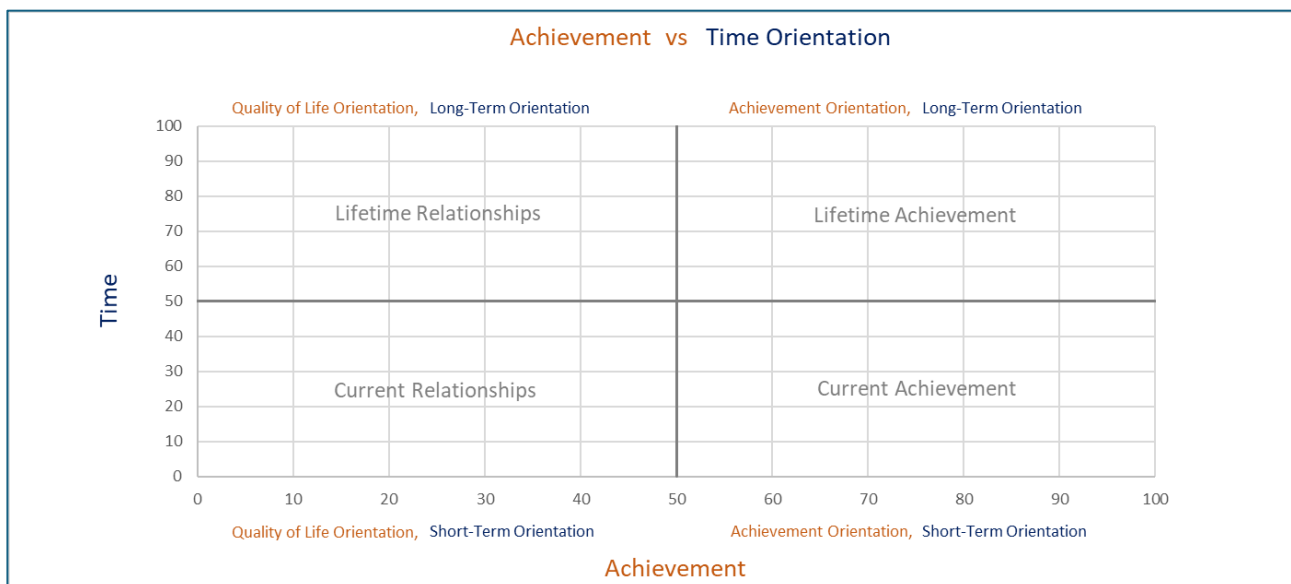
The overlay of the Certainty and Time Orientation explains whether operational systems are designed for immediate efficiency using 'common sense' or sustainable, long-term strategic resilience based on technical solutions

Focus of Life

The overarching priorities and values that guide an individual's (personal and) professional pursuits

The focus of life is shaped by the intersection of Achievement and Time Orientation. This interplay reveals whether individuals emphasize competitiveness and success or prioritize quality of life and relationships, as well as whether they favour immediate rewards or long-term outcomes. Together, these dimensions illuminate how people balance current goals with future aspirations.

In High Achievement, Short-term Oriented contexts such as in the US, rapid success and immediate rewards take precedence. In contrast, cultures like The Netherlands, which prioritize Quality of Life and Long-term perspectives, place greater emphasis on overall well-being.



- **Lifetime Relationships:** Value harmony, family, and long-term relationships
- **Current Relationships:** Prioritise personal happiness and enjoyment
- **Lifetime Achievement:** Career driven, legacy building mindset
- **Current Achievement:** Material success, immediate results

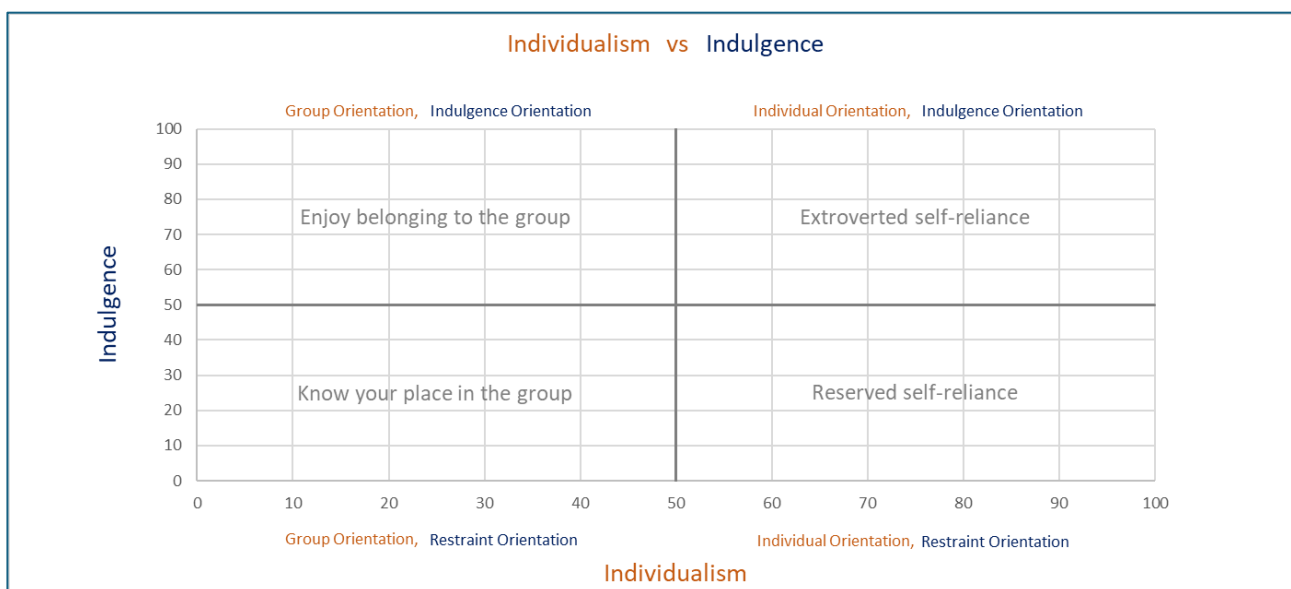
The overlay of the Achievement and Time Orientation dimensions uncovers how the balance between competitiveness, ambition and assertiveness and quality of life and focus on success over a time horizon or quick results ultimately shapes an individuals' overall life priorities and aspirations

Interactions

The ways in which individuals communicate, collaborate and build relationships in the workplace

Interactions in the workplace are influenced by Individualism and Indulgence – providing insights into whether social insights are based on personal needs, or collective belonging and how freely individuals express their emotions and pursue enjoyment. Together, these dimensions explain the level of warmth and openness in interpersonal communications.

In cultures characterized by High Individualism and Indulgence, such as the US, interactions are typically open and expressive. In contrast, cultures that prioritize Group Orientation and Restraint such as China, tend to favour more formal and controlled communication.



- **Enjoy belonging to the group:** Cultivates and values warm, collective and expressive relationships
- **Know your place in the group:** Reserved behaviour, agreeable to group consensus
- **Extroverted self-reliance:** Open and expressive in social interactions
- **Reserved self-reliance:** Selective in social interactions

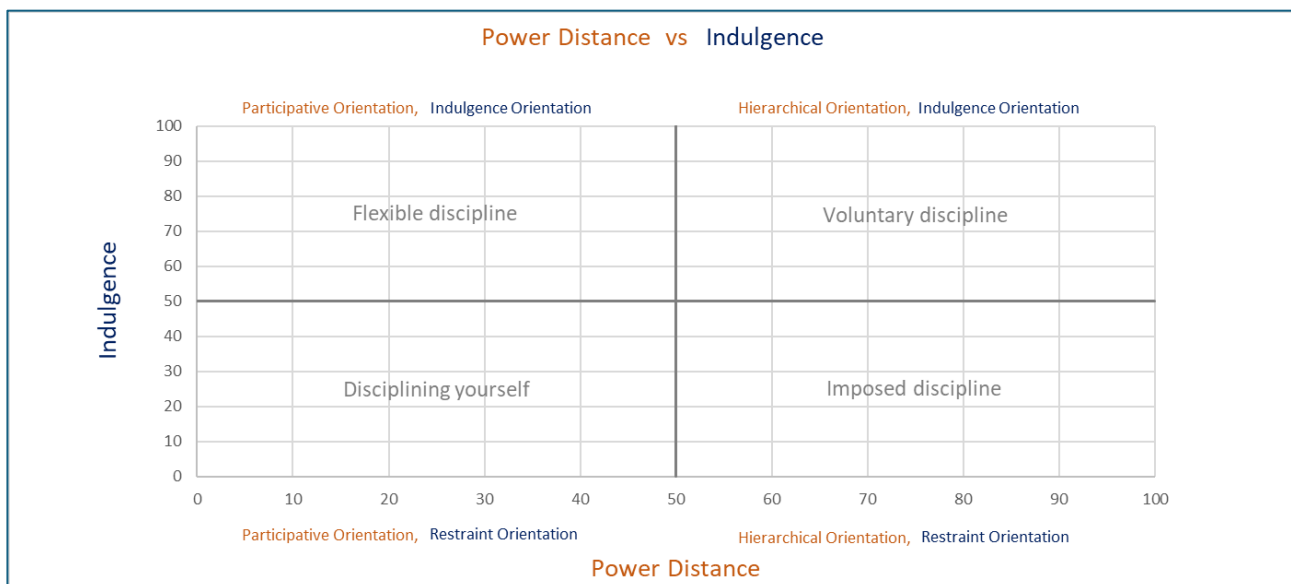
The overlay of the Individualism and Indulgence dimensions reveals the spectrum of interpersonal communications - from reserved, calm, formal exchanges following group norms to optimistic self-expression

Discipline

The practice of enforcing rules and standards to maintain order, consistency and accountability within an organisation

Discipline within an organisation is guided by Power Distance which shapes whether rules are enforced through a top-down authority, or shared among peers – and by Indulgence, referring to the balance between freedom of expression and restraint. Together, these dimensions provide insights on how organisations uphold standards and maintain order.

In cultures with a low Power Distance and Restraint such as Germany, discipline is often self-regulated, and peer enforced. In contrast, in Mexico, where hierarchical structures prevail alongside a high Indulgence Orientation, personal enjoyment is valued, but leaders set the tone that guides behaviour.



- **Flexible discipline:** Self-discipline with personal freedom
- **Disciplining yourself:** Reserved, maintains discipline according to group norms
- **Voluntary discipline:** Enjoyment is allowed – but leaders set the tone
- **Imposed discipline:** Strict discipline imposed by leaders, minimal leisure in work

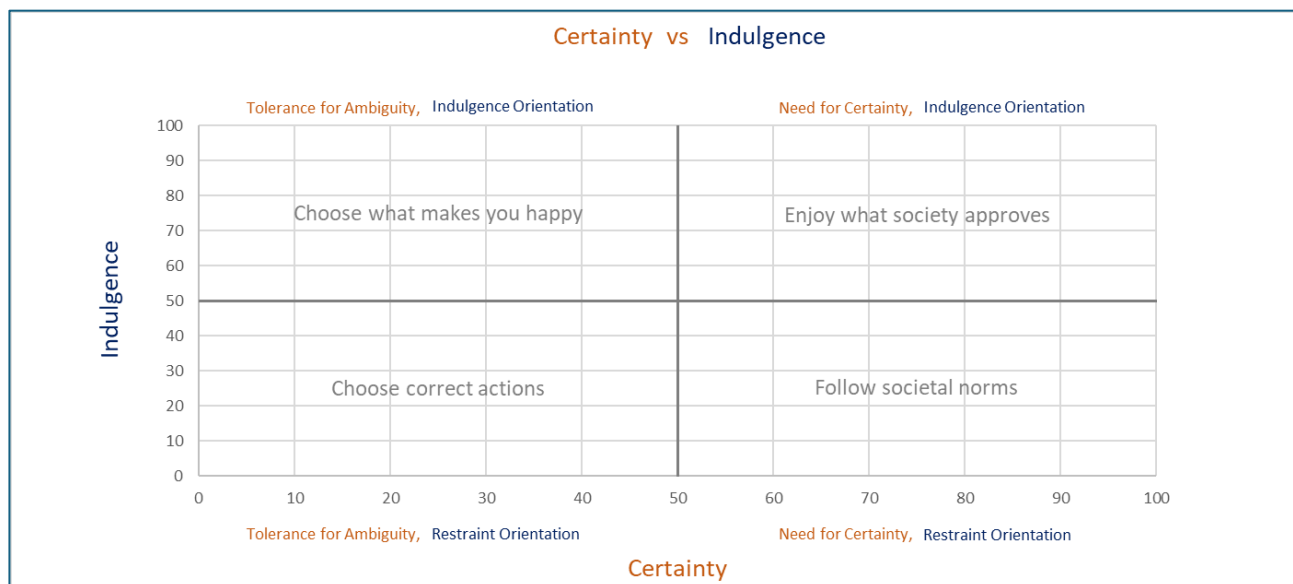
The overlay of the Power Distance and Indulgence dimensions delineates how cultural preferences regarding authority and freedom influence the way in which organisations uphold rules and maintain order

Approach to Life

The general attitude and outlook individuals adopt towards everyday challenges and opportunities

The approach to life insight can be drawn from the overlay of Certainty, which influences how people plan, structure and manage risks and by Indulgence, which determines the degree to which they allow for spontaneity, pleasure and flexibility. Together, these dimensions can provide insights on how individuals balance routines with the freedom to 'enjoy life'.

In cultures with a general preference for high Certainty and Restraint such as Japan, a structured and routine lifestyle prevails, while in environments with a Tolerance for Ambiguity and Indulgent Orientation such as Denmark, there is a more spontaneous and pleasure-oriented approach that supports work-life integration.



- **Choose what makes you happy:** Spontaneous, lifestyle driven by personal happiness
- **Choose correct actions:** Flexible, but conservative lifestyle choices
- **Enjoy what society approves:** Planned enjoyment; structured leisure in line with social norms
- **Follow societal norms:** Life is duty driven

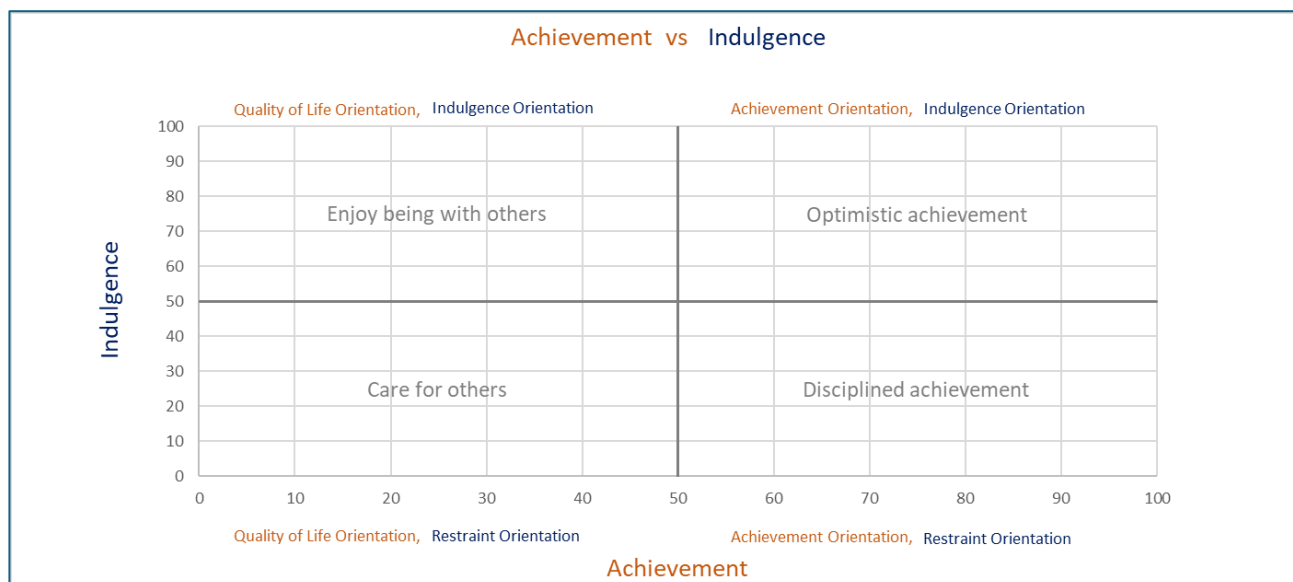
The overlay of the Certainty and Indulgence combination expresses how individuals balance the need for structured environments with their desire for spontaneity, control over one's life and 'thinking outside the box'

Approach to People

The way individuals relate to and treat others, influencing interpersonal dynamics and workplace culture

Approaches to interpersonal interactions in professional settings are shaped by Achievement Orientation, revealing whether behaviour is competitive or empathetic and by Indulgence, which gauges the openness of emotional expression. Together, these dimensions illuminate how individuals connect and engage at work.

For example, in Japan where high Achievement is combined with a culture of Restraint, interactions tend to be competitive and formally structured. In contrast, in the Netherlands and Denmark, which emphasize Quality of Life and Indulgence, relationships are warm, expressive, and focused on social support.



- **Enjoy being with others:** Warm, people-oriented relationships
- **Care for others:** Respectful, and goes out of the way to help people
- **Optimistic achievement:** Friendly, but success-oriented networking
- **Disciplined achievement:** Formal, goal driven interactions

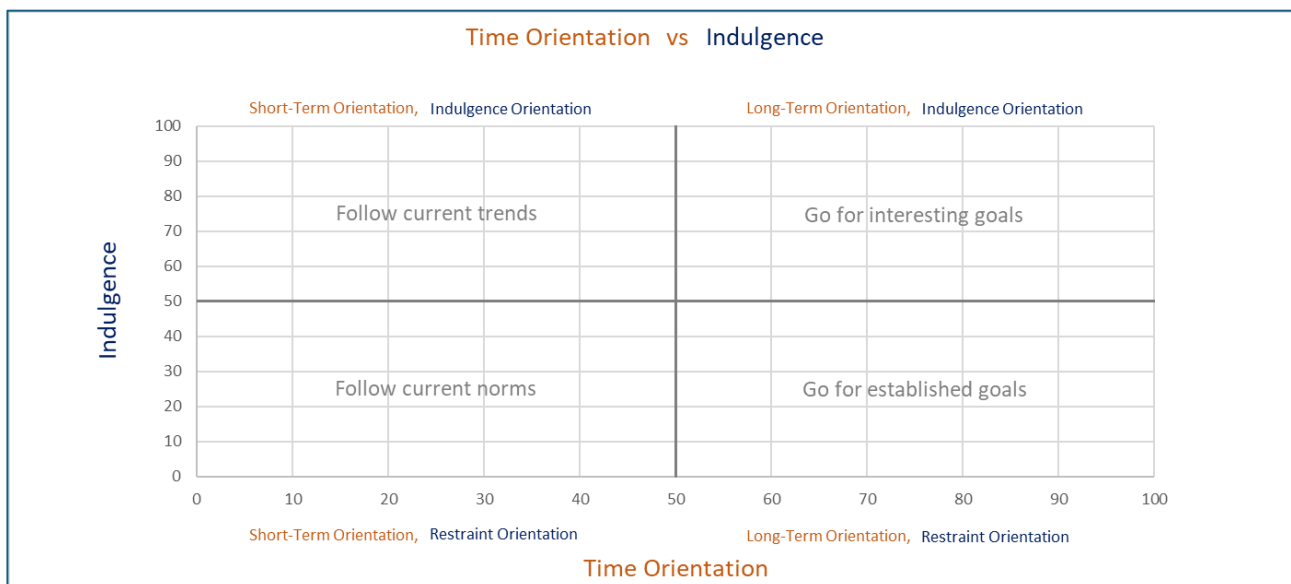
The overlay of Achievement and Indulgence Orientation illustrates the dynamic interplay between competitive ambition and the notion of 'it's nice to be important; but more important to be nice'

Goal Setting

The process of defining clear objectives and outlining steps to achieve personal and organisational success

Goal-setting processes are shaped by two dimensions – Time Orientation and Indulgence. Time Orientation determines whether the focus is on immediate results or long-term strategies, while Indulgence influences the balance between flexibility and discipline. Together, these dimensions illustrate how individuals and teams set objectives, effectively balancing short-term priorities with broader, visionary aspirations.

In high Indulgence, Short-term Oriented environments such as the US, goals may be agile and incorporate aspects of personal fulfilment, whereas in restrained, Long-term Oriented cultures such as Germany, goal setting is rigorous, structured and focussed on sustained success.



- **Follow current trends:** Immediate, flexible goals
- **Follow current norms:** Practical, results driven goal setting
- **Go for interesting goals:** Visionary goals which consider personal interests
- **Go for established goals:** Specific long-term objectives

The interplay of Time Orientation and Indulgence reveals whether objectives are driven by immediate, short-term visions that satisfy basic human desires, or by long-term visions focused on meeting specific needs regulated by social norms

Final Reflections

By examining the interplay between cultural dimensions, these 15 distinct insights ranging from decision making to goal setting collectively illustrate how cultural preferences impact the workplace. These dashboards can provide leaders with actionable frameworks that can be tailored to better understand their people. By aligning leadership strategies with the cultural orientations of the team, leaders can not only improve performance and employee engagement but also cultivate a more inclusive and dynamic workplace.

The following recommendations provide a basis for translating cultural insights into tangible improvements for teamwork and organisational effectiveness and can be used as a starting point for in-tact team intervention programs. By implementing practices such as these, companies can create an environment where cultural differences are not only understood and respected but leveraged upon as key drivers of performance and collaboration.

- Offer individual ownership and recognition where necessary but also emphasise collective goals. Recognise both solo achievements and collaborative successes to keep all team members engaged.
- Combine well defined processes with iterative experimentation – pilot small scale changes before implementing larger initiatives to balance both stability and innovation.
- Cater to diverse motivational drivers – recognise both results and supportive behaviours. Some team members may respond well to performance-based bonuses, while others may value team harmony, work life balance and a collective wellbeing.
- For teams with a longer-term focus, emphasise strategic planning, career development and sustained client relationships. For more immediate oriented teams, celebrate quick wins and maintain momentum through short milestones and frequent feedback loops.
- Implement regular check ins and pulse surveys to gauge team engagement, gather feedback and continue to refine strategies. Continuously adapt leadership practices, policies and styles to evolving team dynamics and cultural preferences.

When running in-tact team programs, it is imperative to remember that cultural preferences are deeply rooted and often learned from early childhood and reinforced by stories and heroes – forming unwritten codes of behaviours shaping both conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings and perceptions. These preferences are reflected in the language used, influence how one interprets events, respond to new situations and make decisions.

The true value in understanding the Hofstede CWQ and cultural dimensions, therefore, lies not in comparing country averages but in the ability to identify behaviours that signal an orientation towards one dimension or another. By recognising these specific cultural cues in oneself and others, one can get a clearer understanding of the rationale behind people's actions and behaviours, enabling them to respond more effectively, sensitively and respectfully. Ultimately, this deeper awareness of cultural influences and preferences strengthens team cohesion and lays the foundation for productive and harmonious collaboration in today's diverse workplace.

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